



# Bishop's *Circular*

For Priests / Sisters

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**Diocese of Thuckalay**

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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

In recent days, Pope Francis issued two important documents that pertain to the life of the church. The first of these documents concerns with the community life of the religious. It is entitled *Communis Vita* (Community Life). The pope amended the Latin Code of Canon Law to include an almost automatic dismissal of religious who are absent without authorization from their community for at least 12 months. The change will come into effect 10 April and it is not retroactive. Canon 694 of the Latin Code of Canon Law currently states that a member must be held as *ipso facto* dismissed from an institute if he/she has defected notoriously from the Catholic faith or has married or attempted to marry. With this new document the Pope included a new clause that will facilitate the dismissal of a member of an order who is illegitimately absent from the community for 12 uninterrupted months and is unreachable. In such cases, the superior and the council of the order can draw up a declaration of the facts and submit it to the Holy See for institutes of pontifical rite or to the local bishop for institutes of diocesan rite. The Pope holds that community life is an essential element of religious life and the religious are to live in their own religious house and are not to be absent from it except with the permission of their legitimate superior.

The second important an Apostolic Letter that the Pope issued in the form of a *motu proprio* that concerns about the protection of minors and vulnerable persons. The document assumes great importance in the context of the prevailing issues connected with paedophilia that has rattled the Catholic Church all over the world. The document lays down guidelines and rules that the Church personnel need to follow in order to avoid abuses of minors and to deal with cases of child abuses that have surfaced in the public domain. It provides new norms for training of Church personnel about the risks of exploitation, sexual abuse, and maltreatment of children and vulnerable persons, as well as the means to identify and prevent such offences. The Pope believes that the protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message. Hence, it is the duty of everyone to generously welcome children and vulnerable persons, and to create a safe environment for them, giving priority to their interests.

As we are in the days of Lent and are about to approach the commemoration of the paschal mysteries of Christ that brought about salvation of all humankind, I want to make some random reflections on the importance of Holy Week. To some of us, this may come as a welcome relief. Sacrifice, mortification

and suffering do not come easily. We would rather carry on in our comfortable lives than stretch ourselves until it hurts for love of him who was stretched on a cross for us. As we prepare ourselves to accept and surrender to the weight of his love before entering into the light hearted celebration of the Easter season, it behoves us to pause each day with some degree of solemn appreciation for him who was glorified by way of surrender and death.

We often wrestle with the question of Pilate: "What is truth?" As he faced Jesus, who is Truth incarnate, he could not answer that question, which was deep burning in his heart. He could not make sense of the confusion that surrounded his position as a political leader. He could not reconcile himself with the spiritual turmoil that was going on within him. We, too, grapple with the same question regarding truth. We seek clarity, but often discover that our lives are full of empty holes and grey spaces that do not delineate between what is true and what is false.

Yet Jesus reminds us as we approach the holiest of weeks that we must remain in him. If we do so, especially by rooting ourselves often in Scripture study and the Sacraments, we will understand truth by way of the illumination of the Holy Spirit he gives us. Truth is not relative. It is not mere philosophy. Truth is a person. If we seek Jesus, we will know truth, live in it, and be free from the shackles of our sins.

Jesus, in his humanity, experienced weaknesses of body, of spirit and of mind. When we are depleted, exhausted, and at the end of our ropes in life, we can recall the journey to Calvary that demonstrated Jesus' manifestation of human weakness. Yet in that weakness, he was fortified by the Father's grace. So must we turn to God all the more when we are tired, overwhelmed and feeling lost.

The weakness of the human spirit can be rectified by serving God fervently and steadfastly. It often begins with gratitude. When we are enveloped in the chasm of darkness and all seems bleak, we must remember the ways God has answered our prayers in the past. If we do this, we will be reminded that he continues to faithfully guide us, even and especially in our darkest hours. Just when we believe all is for naught, God will grant us respite in some way. He is our strength and song.

The depth of loneliness is not easily remedied by human consolation. Even if we do not have any known enemies, even if we are not specifically estranged from anyone or engaged in some sort of misunderstanding, we experience the chasm of loneliness. We do not feel like victors. We do not believe that those who have hurt or wounded us will ever come to understand our sorrow.

During these days, we can reflect upon the question: who is a champion? The readily available metaphor to understand who is a champion is the running race. The one who completes the race, despite setbacks and inevitable stumbling blocks, is a mighty champion. He has persevered to the finish, swept in to overcome his weary flesh, and the reward is his victory.

The only victor we have is God. We cannot become champions of greatness on our own. It seems that our experiences of loneliness, persecution and sorrow are meant to cultivate a deeper dependency on God for everything. We cannot abandon all that we are or all that we have without this understanding that, without God as our mighty champion, we are nothing and have nothing.

Approaching the Holy Week, we somberly recall the sufferings of Jesus. Many of us will bring our own misery to him as an offering of love. Every tear we shed as a gift for Jesus, every heartache and betrayal brought to him with the intention of uniting all to his sacred wounds, draws us away from our own pain and into the compassion of loving Jesus for his own sake.

What must Jesus have felt as his time drew near to enter fully into his Passion? Was he in mourning, lamenting and grieving over the friendships he would have made and the life he would have lived? Did

he feel completely alone, knowing that even his apostles would not fully grasp the value of his death until much later?

We may wonder if Jesus found comfort in the prophet's words: "I will turn their mourning into joy." He knew that suffering was meritless without the resurrection, yet his humanity did not want to undergo the unfathomable torment that was necessary for the joy, consolation, and celebration of the resurrection.

We do not often realize what God is doing in our lives, much like the apostles. We cannot see the fulfillment of God's promises for us when we are in the midst of an intense trial. Yet Jeremiah reminds us that joy comes in the morning and light after the dawn. It is our hope and treasure to cling to this hope when we are near despair.

Finally, on Easter Sunday, the risen Christ becomes the standing icon of humanity in its full and final destiny. He is the pledge and guarantee of what God will do with all our crucifixions. At last we can meaningfully live with hope. It is no longer an absurd or tragic universe. Everything has meaning in our lives. Our hurts and our pains now become the home for our greatest hopes. Without such implanted hope, we may become cynical, bitter, and tired as we grow older in our lives.

It is no accident that Luke's resurrection account in the Gospel has Jesus saying: "I am not a ghost! I have flesh and bones, as you can see" (Luke 24:39-43). Similarly, in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells Thomas: "Put your finger in the wounds!" (John 20:27). In other words, Jesus says: "I am human!" - which means "I am wounded and resurrected at the same time." Christ returns to his physical body, and yet he is now unlimited by space or time while still, ironically, carrying his wounds.

As Lady Julian of Norwich said: "Before God, our wounds are our glory." Even our negatives can be transformed into something beautiful for God. The fact that Jesus' physical wounds do not disappear is telling. The mystical, counter intuitive message of death and resurrection is powerfully communicated through this symbol. The major point of the resurrection is that Jesus has not left the human sphere; he is revealing the goal, the fullness, and the purpose of humanity itself, which is "that we are able to share in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), even in this wounded and wounding world. Yes, resurrection is saying something about Jesus, but it is also saying a lot about us, which is even harder to believe. It is saying that we also are larger than life, being itself, and therefore made for something good, united, and beautiful. Our code word for that is heaven.

Resurrection does not only mean an eternal reward in the future. "As now, so later!" Resurrection is the incarnation taken to its full and logical conclusion. What we choose now, we will indeed be.

All of us believe in the bodily resurrection. But is this belief a mere intellectual assertion, a mere acceptance of a religious doctrine? Or do we go much further than that? We choose to believe in some kind of bodily resurrection because it localizes the Christ mystery in this material and earthly world and in our own bodies, the only world we know and the world that God created and loves.

Resurrection, more importantly, tells us that we are made for transcendence and endless horizons, but our small ego usually gets in the way until we become aware of its petty preoccupations and eventually seek a deeper truth. It is like mining for diamond. We must dig deep.

As Jesus' death and resurrection itself evidences, our death is not just physical dying, but going to full depth, hitting the bottom, going the distance, beyond where I am in control, fully beyond where I am now. Death is no more a scary reality. It has meaning. It is the door to eternal life, door to our own resurrections. Moreover, we can learn from Jesus' resurrection that grace is found at the depths and in the death of everything. We need not be afraid of death anymore. Grace, ultimately, is not something that God gives; grace is who God is. Whether we live or die, we are immersed in grace.

As Christians we believe that we are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The key is to put both together. We need to deeply trust and allow both our own dying and our own certain resurrection, just as much as Jesus did! This is the full pattern of transformation. If we trust both, we are indestructible. That is how Jesus saves us from meaninglessness, cynicism, hatred, and violence - which is indeed death.

The world is tired of hateful religion. Let us stop the game of hatred and violence, by witnessing to the beauty of life, especially the risen life of Christ, which each and every one of us already participates in.

May this season of Easter help us dig deep into our lives, and witness to the risen Christ in ever creative ways! Let me wish all of you in advance Happy Easter!

## NEWS AND EVENTS

**Launching of Eparchial Mobile App:** Syro-Malabar Church has introduced a Mobile App for updating the statistics of all Eparchies. It is also meant for the people to interact with the Church personnel. The Mobile App application was inaugurated in our Eparchy on 2 March 2019 at Padanthalumoodu. Rev. Fr Joby, Director of Syro-Malabar Internet Mission, came along with his team and introduced the Mobile App in the Eparchy in the presence of our Fathers and a large number of faithful. I thank Rev. Fr Jinu Thekkethalackal for organizing the programme well.

**SINAI Theological Faculty:** The Sinai Theological Faculty plans to organise a two years diploma course for the catechism teachers of our Eparchy. The first phase of the course will be organised for the teachers of Padanthalumoodu and Nithravailai Foranes at Padanthalumoodu. I met all the catechism teachers of these both Foranes on 10 March 2019 and explained to them about the importance of attending this course. Dear Fathers, I request you to encourage the catechism teachers to register their names and to take part in the diploma course.

**Backing Unit in Karunai Illam, Nithravailai:** In order to rehabilitate the differently abled children and to raise some income for the Centre, we have begun a Backing Unit at Karunai Illam Nithravailai. The inauguration was held on 27 March 2019. Rev. Fr Jose Muttathupadam, VG of the Eparchy, presided over the programme. It coincided with the anniversary of Karunai Illam Special School. The production unit is capable of making cakes, bread, cup cakes, various types of biscuits, etc. To begin with, the unit is planning to prepare Maundy Thursday special bread. You may contact Rev. Fr Sanil Panthichirackal or ASMI Sisters at Karunai Illam Nithravailai for placing orders. I sincerely thank Rev. Fr Sanil and ASMI Sisters at Nithravailai for their selfless service in Karunai Illam.

**News from the Extended Mission Territories:** Along with Rev. Fr Thomas Koipuram and Rev. Fr Ginoy Thottiyil and Rev. Fr Peter Kizhakeyil, I visited the Ordinaries of Irinjalakuda, Thrissur, Kothamangalam and Thamarassery on 13, 14 and 26 March 2019 in order to invite them to join in the Mission work in the extended territories of our Eparchy. We presented the actual situation of these territories and made them understand the immense possibilities that exist in these areas for mission work. All the Bishops were very positive and assured their help in the mission work of the Eparchy. On 25 March, we travelled to Idukki to meet the provincials of FCC, SABS, SH and CMC in order to invite their respective congregations to open communities in the extended areas of the Eparchy. Let us continue to pray for our missionaries, who are already working in these mission territories.

**Special Ecclesiastical Province Meeting at Changanassery:** A special meeting of four Eparchies of our ecclesiastical province was held on 26 March 2019 at Archbishop's House, Changanassery.

Archbishop Mar Joseph Perumthottam chaired the meeting. Bishops of Kanjirappally, Palai and Thuckalay along with their Curia members were present. I made a presentation on the need and the urgency to carry out mission work in those extended areas where the Eparchy of Thuckalay could not initiate any mission work. The Bishops and the Fathers present were very appreciative of the initiatives that we have already taken. After a long discussion about the possibility of mission work, the availability of personnel and raising of financial resources, the Bishops came forward to sponsor a district each for mission work with the assistance from our Fathers. The Archeparchy of Changanassery chose the district of Viruthunagar, Eparchy of Palai chose the districts of Ramanathapuram and Sivagangai, Eparchy of Kanjirappally chose the district of Theni. The Eparchy of Irinjalakuda has chosen the district of Thoothukudy for the mission work. As you are aware, our Eparchy has already begun mission work in Thirunelveli and Madurai districts. Let us pray for the success of these initiatives. I thank the Bishops for generosity in helping us to extend the evangelizing work of in the Eparchy.

### INFORMATION

- ❖ **Word of Gratitude to Rev. Sr Glorista SD:** Rev. Sr Glorista SD is one of the pioneering sisters in the region. She began the first SD Convent at Munchirai in 1980, which runs *Anbaham* for the aged people. After two years she became a teacher at St Xavier's School, Varuthattu and there she worked for twelve years without salary (1982-1994). After brief periods of ministries in Kerala and other places, she returned to our Eparchy and worked in Munchirai (1998-2000 and 2013-2019) and Varuthattu (2000-2003) Convents. Almost 25 years she has rendered her missionary service to the Kanyakumari mission and to our Eparchy. She is now 83 years old. Due to health reasons, she has returned to her province in Kerala on 30 March 2019 for rest and for better treatment. In the name of the Eparchy, I extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to her for the dedicated service that she has rendered.
- ❖ **Diaconate and Minor Orders:** Br Robin Jose and Br Toji Kozhuvakandathil will receive the order of Diaconate on 15 April 2019 at Marappady at 5.30 pm, while Br Shijo Jose will be ordained Deacon in Rome on 13 May 2019. Br Josemon Paul and Br Mahesh receive *Karoyutha* and Br Ajin CR, Georgekutty Kandathil, Br Shijin Dev, Br Joseph (Prince) George Cherippanattu and Br Joseeph (Liju Mathew) Marattukulam will receive their clerical habit at St Mary's Minor Seminary, Mukkoottukal on 15 April 2019. Let us remember them in our prayers.
- ❖ **Holiday Programmes for Major Seminarians:** Our major seminarians will come to our Eparchy on 7 April and they will be engaged in many eparchial programmes till 13 May 2019. They will organise work camp, help in the Holy Week services, prepare for the administration of Orders and Ministries, organise VBS, etc. This year the work camp for our major seminarians will be held at Kumarakoil from 8 to 12 April 2019. I request all the Fathers to visit and encourage them. If any of you require the service of major seminarians in your parish, please contact Rev. Fr Joshy. I welcome all our Brothers and wish them fruitful time in the Eparchy.
- ❖ **St Thomas Church, Muzhucode** published its Golden Jubilee Magazine on 3 March 2019.
- ❖ **Rev. Fr Shoji Puthenpurayil** reached safely in Ireland and he is appointed assistant parish priest at Assumption parish in the diocese of Limerick. His postal address is: Church of Assumption, Abbeyfeale, Convent Road, Abbeyfeale Co. Limerick, Ireland. His phone number is 0894431992. I wish him all the best and fruitful ministry in Ireland.

- ❖ **RIP:** Mr Mathew Thomas (96), father of Rev. Fr Kurian Koipuram, was called to his eternal reward on 3 March 2019 and the funeral was held on 5 March 2019 at Mutholi. Rev Sr Ancilin FCC and Rev. Sr Julit FCC also lost their father on 4 March 2019 and the funeral was held on 5 March 2019 at Edappalayam. I extend heartfelt condolences and prayers to our dear Fr Kurian, Sisters and their bereaved family members.
- ❖ **Election:** Election Commission has announced that the Lok Sabha election will be held on 18 March 2019. Although, it falls on Maundy Thursday, let us encourage our people to exercise their franchise and vote for secular parties. Kindly urge them to vote in the morning, preferably, before 10 am, so that they can take part in the celebration of the last supper of our Lord.
- ❖ **VBS:** Our children will end their final examinations soon and they will have their summer vacation. It is a great opportunity for us to have them in our parishes for the VBS programmes. I am sure all of you are preparing well in advance for this great event, which will go a long way in catechising our young generation. The catechism department together with Fathers and Brothers will organise the VBS training programme for teachers and thereafter in the parishes. I recommend that you send maximum number of teachers for the training. As I mentioned during the priests' conference, kindly give opportunities to every child to use the new VBS text book specially prepared for them. Wishing you all God's blessing for this event, which will be held in the months of April and May.
- ❖ **Priestly ordination of Dn. Abilash:** Every priest is a blessing to the church and we have a reason to rejoice and thank God for the same. Dn. Abilash will be ordained priest on 24 April, 2019 at St. Thomas Church, Muzhucode. The ordination ceremony will begin at 9.00 am. I request all the fathers and sisters to be present for the function; it will surely give a witness value and encouragement to the new priest. Also bring some representative from your parishes; we expect maximum number of faithful from Manjalumoodu and Arukani Foranes. Our sincere prayers and best wishes to Dn. Abilash
- ❖ **Priesthood Day and Recollection:** On Holy Thursday, we commemorate the institution of Priesthood in the Church. We are privileged to be ministers of the Word and the Sacraments. In order to remember and thank God for the gifts of Priesthood and Religious Life, we shall hold a one-day recollection with Holy mass on Wednesday, 17 February 2019 at Sangamam. It starts at 9.30am and ends at 2.00 pm with Tea. I warmly invite all the fathers and sisters to attend this recollection.

#### **One Day Recollection on 17 April 2019**

Venue: **Sangamam**

09.30am	: Arrival
09.45am	: Breaking the Word
	Bishop Vincent Mar Paulose, Bishop of Marthandam
11.00am	: Coffee Break
11.15am	: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Confessions
12.30pm	: Holy Qurbana (Day of Priesthood)
02.00pm	: Departure

## FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

05 April 2019	- Graduation Ceremony at St Alphonsa College
08-12 April 2019	- Work Camp of Major Seminarians at Kumarakoil
14 April 2019	- Palm Sunday
15 April 2019	- Vestition and Minor Orders at Mukkoottukal
15 April 2019	- Diaconate at Marappady
17 April 2019	- One Day Recollection for Priests and Religious at Sangamam
18 April 2019	- Maundy Thursday
19 April 2019	- Good Friday
20 April 2019	- Good Saturday
21 April 2019	- Easter
24 April 2019	- Priestly Ordination of Deacon Abilash at Muzhucode

## CONCLUSION

As I conclude this circular, let me remind you that we are still in the holy season of Lent. We are called upon to spend these days spiritually undertaking the disciplines prayer, fasting and almsgiving in a meaningful way. Let us not lose the fervour of this season and not deprive ourselves of the graces that this holy season brings. During this period, even as we discipline our bodies through self-denial and fasting, let us give emphasis on embodying the values we preach. Let us emphasize on God's love, and how we need to embody this love in our own ministries. Love consists not in limiting God by our human equations of love, but allowing God's infinite love to utterly redefine our own.

With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+ **George Rajendran SDB**  
Bishop of Thuckalay

